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ABSTRACT

Professional physical educators can facilitate, encourage, and promote a significant contribution to the social institution of youth sports through the roles of positive acceptance, active participation, and research. A positive attitude of acceptance relative to the impact and influence of youth sports on the profession as well as on society in general will help the physical educator and nonprofessional community volunteers to work together in youth sports programs. Active participation involves the professional physical educator in seeking tangible ways to intervene and contribute to the welfare of youth sports. Physical educators can serve as coaches, officials, community leaders, information disseminators, and as members of central governing councils. The physical educator can also make a contribution to the institution of youth sports as a researcher, since an understanding of sports becomes important in the development of an understanding of society in general. The physical educator has a professional obligation to do his part to enhance the welfare of the participant and society in general as it relates to youth sports. (CJ)

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THE ROLE OF THE PHYSICAL EDUCATOR IN YOUTH SPORTS

Youth Sports is defined as team sports organized by adults and sponsored by organizations other than school systems. These organizations and sponsorships include YMCA Athletic programs, municipal and county parks and recreation athletic programs, boys and girls clubs sports programs and a host of other autonomous leagues, such as little league baseball and Pee-Wee football.

The purpose of this article is not to debunk or critically attack youth sports programs. Criticism has been sufficiently exhausted by numerous authors including the present writers, (Martens, 1979; Coakely, 1978; Gilliam, 1978).

The purpose of this article is to offer some rational guidelines for establishing a positive role for professional physical educators that will facilitate, encourage, and promote a significant contribution to the ever growing established social institution of youth sports.

The guidelines offered are categorized into the role of a positive acceptance, the role of active participator, and the role of the researcher.

First is the role of positive acceptance. In general, the role of the physical educator has been one of the critic who has viewed the sport scene as second class to interschool and intramural athletics. As a critic, the physical educator's contribution to the positive side of this social phenomenon has been nil. The critic has done nothing more than expounded and documented what is generally already known. If youth

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sport is indeed second class, it is second class only possibly in talent, and certainly not in participants' involvement and its impact on society. Several truths seem self-evident. First, youth sports are a reality of contemporary American culture. With the tremendous growth of girls' sports programs and the successful introduction of other sports to America, such as soccer, youth sports will continue to have rapid growth. Secondly, the majority of coaches and managers of youth sports teams are not formally trained physical educators. Even if placement of youth sports coaches was controllable, it would be impossible to select professional physical educators due to the large number of little league teams. There simply would not be enough physical educators for all teams. The situation will undoubtedly continue as it has for the last thirty-eight years. Coaches of youth sports teams will come from interested parents and community people, some selfish and some sincere, attempting to serve today's youth the only way they know. Many, it would be safe in assuming, are lacking the expertise necessary for an optimal experience.

It therefore behooves the professional physical educator to develop a positive attitude of acceptance relative to the impact and influence of youth sports on the profession as well as greater society.

Secondly, the role of participation involves the professional physical educator seeking tangible ways to intervene and contribute to the welfare of youth sports. On the surface, physical educators can involve themselves as coaches and officials. A greater impact can be made by serving as community leader for local youth sports programs. Often, the committees are

the hub of the decision making mechanism and welcomes professional input and leadership. A word of caution! The professional educator must maintain a low profile when working with non-professionals in committee involvement. Further, professionals can assume the role of disseminating pertinent information and materials. Knowledge of the sport, practice organizations, skill development procedures, psychological considerations, as well as the purpose of the experiences are major weaknesses of youth sports programs.

The physical educator can begin to resolve these weaknesses through the dissemination of information by conducting clinics, workshops, the distribution of newsletters, and formation of youth sports centers or institutes. Noted physical educators who have initiated such a mechanism are Vern Seefeldt, Michigan State University; Rainer Martens, University of Illinois, and Jack Hutslar, Kernersville, North Carolina.

Due to the fact there are so many various agencies involved in youth sports programs, there is a need for central governing councils. The physical educator should be about the role of helping to formulate such councils that would have representation from the various local agencies for the purpose of establishing, coordinating, and unifying procedures and policies, thereby enhancing the greater youth sports community.

As a third and final role, the physical educator can make a tremendous contribution to the institution of youth sports as a researcher. There are several good reasons why physical educators should involve themselves as researchers. In general, with such involvement on the part of so many people, an understanding of sports becomes important in the development of an overall understanding of everyday life (Snyder and Spreitzer, 1974).

This general implication is certainly applicable to youth sports. In Atlanta, more than 30,000 under 14 youngsters participate in city-sponsored sports. Another 6,000 belong to the boys' club. Thousands more play in some 30 independent sports in and around Atlanta (Coakley, Jay, J., 1978). With this much participation it seems appropriate to suggest that the physical educator could make a tremendous contribution to the understanding of childhood development by exploring different social concepts through youth sports.

Further, a good case can be made for the youth sport community as a research component. Sport teams are generally unique forms of complex organizations with remarkably controlled size, set rules and relationships between positions. Moreover, racial and cultural boundaries are generally crossed.

Finally, the physical educator should consider the role of the researcher. Because there is a need within youth sports to have access to information that could lead to positive changes and to the development of forms of sports activities that could benefit more people on the level of direct participation (Coakley, Jay J., 1978).

There are many crucial issues involved in youth sports that would allow the physical educator to critically justify refraining from taking an active role. By doing so would not solve anything. Also, mere critical lip service simply falls on deaf, hostile and impervious ears. Thus the physical educator must play a positive active role. It is the professional obligation of the physical educator to do his part to enhance the welfare of the participant and society in general as it relates to youth sports.

Three areas of involvement have been suggested. They are: the role of positive acceptance, the role of the active participant, and the role of the researcher.

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